



Case report

A case report of necrophilia – A psychopathological view

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the case of a 40-year-old German man who was convicted for disturbing the dead. He performed heterosexual necrophilic acts over the course of two decades. The most recent case was well documented by the necrophiliac himself by means of photography and video. His actions ranged from visiting cemeteries to dissecting bodies and taking the body parts home with him for sexual purposes. The perpetrator displayed no signs of other psychiatric illnesses. The case is discussed in light of the currently available literature.

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1. Introduction

Necrophilia, or the sexual relation and attraction to corpses, is one of the rarest and most extraordinary sexual disorders found in the legal field. It is classified in the DSM-IV-TR as a paraphilia not otherwise specified.¹ The disorder is considered rare. However, this conclusion is drawn on the fact that there is little information available on the subject and no information present on the frequency of undetected necrophilia.² Necrophilia enjoyed its first scientific detailed description in Krafft-Ebings' *Psychopathia sexualis*.³ Krafft-Ebbing described necrophilia as a type of sexual sadism, arguing that the origins of the disorder were not understood. A thorough review and overview of literature on necrophilia of the decennia following the work of Krafft-Ebbing is presented by Burg.²

Several authors have attempted to classify various types of necrophilic activity. The most recent were described by Rosman and Resnick,⁴ and Aggrawal.⁵ Rosman and Resnick proposed 2 subgroups based on their review of 122 cases of necrophilia: (i) genuine necrophilia and (ii) pseudonecrophilia. Genuine necrophilia is present in those who have a persistent sexual attraction to corpses. This type of necrophilia may manifest itself in the fantasies of a person or in the form of necrophilic acts. Most of the genuine necrophiles are argued to fit the DSM-IV diagnosis paraphilia not otherwise specified.¹ Rosman and Resnick distinguish 3 subgroups within the genuine necrophilia typology based upon the nature of

the act: (1) Necrophilic homicide, (2) regular necrophilia, and (3) necrophilic fantasy. Necrophilic homicide is defined by the act of murder to obtain a corpse for sexual purposes. A recent study analyzed 16 sexual-homicide cases in which necrophilic activity was present.⁶ They found this case of homicide to be the least common type, constituting of less than 1% of all homicides. However, none of their subjects killed with the goal of obtaining a corpse, which excludes them from the necrophilic homicide group. They would find a better fit under the later described pseudonecrophilia typology. Regular necrophilia is found in those who use pre-existing dead bodies for sexual purposes. Necrophilic fantasy is described as the act of fantasizing about sexual actions with dead bodies with the absence of any real sexual activity with corpses.

There is a transient attraction to corpses in Pseudonecrophilia, but the corpse is not the object of the sexual fantasy. The necrophilic acts occur as sadistic, opportunistic or transitory actions. Pseudonecrophiles also prefer contact with the living. Next to referring to those whose primary objective of a necrophilic act is not the attraction to a corpse, some alternative definitions of pseudonecrophilia are presented by different authors. Shaffer and Penn⁷ gave the term pseudonecrophilia to those who experience arousal from having sex with someone pretending to be dead. Others have applied the term to those who experience erotic fantasies of having sex with a corpse in conjuncture with masturbation, without any physical contact to actual dead bodies.^{8,9} People, who would have sex with a dead body given the opportunity, even though they would rather have sexual intercourse with the living, have also been classified as pseudonecrophiliacs.⁵

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Aggrawal proposes a ten-tier classification based on the severity of the psychosexual disorder.⁵ It is argued that due to the confusion around the term pseudonecrophilia and the new literature available since Rosman and Resnick's classification, there is need for this new classification method. The following ten classes of necrophilia are suggested:

- *Class I necrophiliacs: the role players.* These persons get sexually aroused by sexual contact with a living person pretending to be dead.
- *Class II necrophiliacs: the romantic necrophiles.* These persons are described as those who are normal bereaved people who cannot bear separation from their loved ones. After the death of their loved one they continue to relate to the body sexually as they did before the passing. It is suggested that they recover as time passes.
- *Class III necrophiliacs: necrophilic fantasizers.* This class fits those who only fantasize about having sex with a corpse, but do not have any physical contact with one. Those who masturbate in cemeteries or would enjoy sexual actions close to a coffin are included in this class.
- *Class IV necrophiliacs: tactile necrophiles.* These type of necrophiles need to touch a corpse in an erotic way to obtain an orgasm.
- *Class V necrophiliacs: Fetishistic necrophiles.* Fetishistic necrophiles are described as those who will not engage in any sexual intercourse with dead bodies but cut up or cut off some portion of the body for fetishistic activities. They may also keep a part of the dead body close to them.
- *Class VI necrophiliacs: necromutilomaniacs.* These persons are described as those who do not engage in any sexual intercourse with a corpse. However, they experience sexual pleasure from mutilating corpses in combination with simultaneous masturbation. It may occur that part of the dead body is eaten (necrophagia).
- *Class VII necrophiliacs: opportunistic necrophiles.* They are described as persons who normally enjoy sexual relations with the living. If however an opportunity would arise, they would have sex with a dead body. Rosman and Resnick (1989) categorize these types of necrophiliacs under pseudonecrophilia.
- *Class VIII necrophiliacs: regular necrophiles.* Persons categorized in this typology are described as 'classical necrophiles'. Regular necrophiles would not enjoy sexual intercourse with the living. They would seek out, or even steal a dead body to have sexual intercourse with. However, regular necrophiles would however also have sexual contact with the living, but it is not preferred.
- *Class IX necrophiliacs: homicidal necrophiles.* They are classified as the most dangerous category of necrophiliacs. Homicidal necrophiles are described as persons who resort to killing to obtain a dead body to have sex with.
- *Class X necrophiliacs: exclusive necrophiles.* These are persons who are unable to have sexual intercourse with the living. They will only have sex with dead bodies.

There has been a diminished interest in necrophilia during the last decennia.² A search on *pubmed* with the word 'necrophilia' resulted in 42 articles, which indicates the small body literature available on the subject from modern sources. Most knowledge on the subject of necrophilia stems from single case reports and descriptive studies. At present, it still seems necessary to present more cases of necrophilia in order to create a larger data-pool for the scientific community to analyze and gain knowledge from.

2. The current case

The current case-study describes the case of G. who was arrested in 2000. He was caught performing heterosexual necrophilic acts. After his arrest, G. was questioned by the police several times and, on

court order, researched by a forensic psychiatrist at the Institute for forensic psychiatry and psychology in Homburg, Germany. The case has previously been described from forensic medical standpoint with the emphasis on the documentation of the events.¹⁰ The current article will attempt to view the case from a forensic psychiatric and psychological standpoint, with the emphasis on psychopathology.

2.1. Personal information

G. is a 40-year-old married German man who has two children, both in their teenage years, and was employed as a civil engineer at his families' company, which was run by his father and who inherited the company from his father. G. grew up in a small rural city in the German province of Bayern with approximately 30,000 inhabitants. He described his upbringing as predominantly normal and religious. The relationship with his parents was described as trustful and predominantly strict. His hobbies included repairing and studying electronic appliances and radio transmissions. He also enjoyed several sporting activities. He was a member in several musical clubs during his childhood, playing a range of instruments. He had a sister who was 4 years younger than him and was described as someone with deviant behaviour. G. felt he had to compete with her during his childhood.

G.'s intellectual abilities have been estimated to be above average (estimated IQ of 130). He went through normal educational tracts, completed high school with good grades and obtained a civil engineering degree at a university for applied sciences. He described himself as a shy student, but not as one without friends. Before starting his university studies, he was drafted into military service and completed a service of 1 year. He displayed no disciplinary problems. He stated to have enjoyed his time in the army. During his studies he married his wife at the age of 22. After the completion of his education at the age of 27, he moved back to the city he grew up in. There he purchased a house close to his parents' house. In his free time he enjoyed hiking, trips to other cities and working with his personal computer.

He and his 37-year-old wife have been together for approximately 20 years. G. described their relationship as loving and without any problems during the first decade of marriage. They had a normal sexual relationship. During the 3 years prior to his arrest he and his wife had their first major fight. They fought about the frequency of sex in their relationship. His wife complained that the amount of intercourse he desired was too much. He subsequently felt misunderstood and thought that his wife did not love him sufficiently. There were, however, never signs of an impending divorce.

G. was described as a person who was able to form stable relationships, not only with his wife and his family, but also with others. There were no psychiatric disorders, next to the paraphilia, observed in G. There were no psychotic symptoms present in G. and he had no deficits in memory functions. There were also no signs of an affective disorder or a personality disorder. He never had previous contact with psychiatric institutions. He did however experience thoughts of suicide while one of his sons was under psychiatric treatment. At the time, a reactive depression was diagnosed, which was subsequently psycho-pharmacologically treated one year before his final necrophilic act. No signs of substance abuse were registered. He was a non-smoker and he had never used drugs. His alcohol consumption could be considered to be minimal.

2.2. Sexual development

The interest in dead bodies found its origin in his early childhood. G. would describe how he would see his father slaughter hares and rabbits, and that the intestines would be removed. He did not feel any physical arousal at the time, but the events never left

his memory. G. also described a situation where, at the age of 6, he developed an interest in- and visits a bone-house. With the age of 7 he is often preoccupied with studying books about illnesses. He never butchered or killed animals himself, but he would often find a dead animal and cut it open. At the age of 16, he develops a fascination for the ossuary of a nearby town. He would also watch movies involving cannibals which aroused him. At a certain point in time, he got curious as to how a person would look like from the inside. This was in the beginning of the eighties. He started looking at obituaries and began visiting cemeteries. He did not attempt any other activities besides visiting cemeteries and watch bodies which would be on display in a morgue. At the age of 22, he broke into a morgue for the first time, where he found and opened a coffin. He would later state that he could not recall if he saw a body or not, or if he had even opened a coffin. G. did not touch the body nor did he masturbate. He stated that he still felt inhibited during this time. After this incident, he continued to visit different cemeteries and break into various morgues to watch corpses. He would obtain information about the presence of new corpses from the obituaries. It is however unclear as to how far his activities with the bodies went. He would continue to visit cemeteries and morgues throughout the nineties. He frequently described situations where he would still experience inhibitory feelings and would halt his activities in a morgue. Throughout the eighties and nineties he collected bones which he found in cemeteries. There were several years, from the age of 28 through 35, where he experienced no preoccupation with the dead. However, he would still cut open a dead animal occasionally when he found one. After this period he started to read obituaries and visit cemeteries again, as well as beginning to view bizarre pornographic websites.

Parallel to the development of the paraphilia, G. also developed normal sexual behaviour which enabled him to maintain a normal (sexual) relationship with his wife. He lost his virginity at the age of 21 to his wife. He had few prior experiences with women, but G. described himself as primarily shy and passive during his youth. G. was described as having a high sex drive with an interest in many different sexual themes like taking nude photographs of his wife. He was constantly looking for sexual confirmation from his wife. They had sexual intercourse approximately twice a week. According to G. his wife was not an active participant during intercourse.

A search on his computer after his arrest revealed further proof of G.'s sexual deviant interests. Thousands of pictures were found involving people in accidents and body parts; cannibalistic and necrophilic content; and pictures of prepubescent and pubescent boys and girls. He started downloading these pictures around 1996.

2.3. Act description

There was sufficient information present on 3 distinct incidents. All 3 were young women between the ages of 14 and 29. He kept several body parts of the women at his house. He also claimed that the following three cases where the only times he had actually had any direct physical contact with corpses. Alcohol and drugs played no role in these encounters. He did not know any of the corpses personally. He had never met the persons while they were alive. The third encounter contains the most information, as it was the offence for which he was arrested. He also documented this third offence thoroughly by taking an excessive amount of photographs. All of his documented activity was within a 20 km range of his home.

2.4. Incident I

In 1981, he took the corpse of an 18-year-old woman of whom he removed the legs for easier transport. He took it to a field where he cut the body into pieces and buried it. After 4 years he dug the

body back up again. He took the bones back home with him. His wife threw most of the bones away, which were in a cardboard box in the attic. Some of the bones he still possessed and were spread across his house, his bureau and next to his PC.

2.5. Incident II

In 1985, he broke into a morgue in a town 5.8 km from his hometown. An obituary of a woman in her twenties he had read in the paper induced his actions. After entering the morgue, he proceeded to cut open the abdominal wall with a knife. He then cut off her breasts and removed her eyes. He took her breasts home with him, but threw them away when they started to produce unpleasant odours.

During these first two acts he experienced certain levels of disgust for dead bodies. He would use rubber gloves to touch them. He tried to reduce his feelings of disgust by looking at pictures of corpses on the internet.

2.6. Incident III

In November 1999, G. broke into a morgue in a neighbouring town. He had learnt from an obituary that a 14-year-old girl was run over by a train. He immediately got interested in seeing the corpse. At night, he gained access to the morgue by using a key he had at his home. This suggests he had one made or copied a key to gain free access to the morgue. After opening the casket and exploring the body he dragged the girl to his car and put her in the trunk. He had expected the body to be more damaged and had actually hoped that this would have been the case so he could have left the body alone. Before putting her in his car, he groped her breasts and looked at her vagina. He was aroused and his body was trembling. He did not have an erection, but he did experience a feeling of happiness and arousal. After putting the body in the trunk he drove to a yard where he put the body of the girl in a container. There he took photographs of her using a digital camera. After a while he locked the container and went home. The next day he returned to the container and undressed the body. He took several pictures of it again before leaving. Throughout these events he experienced sexual arousal. He returned the same day and inspected the body, including the vagina. He played with it with his fingers and pulled apart the labia so he could take a closer look. He wanted to have sex with the body, but after opening his pants he lost his erection. He did not try to penetrate the corpse, but the sexual arousal was so strong that he masturbated in front of the body. This was followed by hours of playing with the body and taking pictures of it. After a while he got curious as to how the body would look from the inside and began to dissect the corpse. During the entire process he kept taking pictures. He did not wear any gloves this time because he wanted to have physical contact with the body. He stated that the gloves would only inhibit him. He cut off the head and the legs and put most of the intestines in plastic containers. The face was also removed in such a manner that it represented a mask. The dissecting aroused him, but he did not masturbate again during this process. He also cut of the woman's breasts and put them in a bucket to take home with him that night. The following weeks he would take body parts home with him on a daily basis (e.g. the head, breasts and intestines). He wanted to clean them. He put them in a bathtub and proceeded to lie in the bathtub with the body parts. While touching the body parts he masturbated. He had a special interest in the bowels, which he cleaned and blew up with air. He wanted to conserve them using methylated spirits and salt. He disposed of the arms and legs by throwing them into a river. He kept the body parts hidden from his family and brought them back to the container after a while. G. continued using the corpse until January 2000. He would come

up with different excuses to have time for his necrophilic activities, as he would sometimes spend days with the body(-parts) or on the internet. As an alibi, he would tell people that he was going on a holiday, be at work or spending time with his two sons.

During these events he took approximately 5000 of pictures and made multiple videos. These pictures revealed the process in detail and displayed how he hung up the body around its neck, tied it to a cross and how he placed the severed head in the stomach which he had cut open. The photographs revealed details of how he dissected the body, specifically with regard to the genital area. It also displayed his activities with the body parts at his home, where he penetrated the mouth and the neck with his erection. There were photographs of him in a bathtub covered with various body parts (Fig. 1), in which his partly erected penis was clearly visible. There was a large collection of photographs of the bowels in which he wrapped them around his genitals or spread them across a field outside. There were also pictures present in which he positioned the removed ovaries on his genitalia, as well as the jawbone.

Additionally, several texts and drawings involving necrophilic, as well as regular murder were found. He downloaded and wrote stories himself, which involved men kidnapping and digging up women. The majority of the fiction ended similar to the downloaded content: A man would cut open a women's stomach and remove the bowels. G. would later state that the short stories he had written were about his anger towards his mother and sister, or even women in general.

3. Discussion

G.'s characteristics fit the findings of Rosman and Resnick who found the majority of necrophiliacs to be male, heterosexual, with an IQ above 100, nonpsychotic, to have a history of sadistic acts, to engage with corpses of the opposite gender and to have had non-necrophilic intercourse prior to their necrophilic acts.⁴ Unlike most necrophilic offenders, G. was married. G. seemed not to have engaged in vaginal intercourse with the corpses. It has however been stated that vaginal intercourse is not an essential component of necrophilia.^{4,9}

The development of the necrophilia was of an exploratory character. The photographs of the body parts and the way they have dissected suggest that G. had some anatomical knowledge, possibly gathered from the medical books he read as a child. He appeared to have a fixation on bowels, breasts and genitalia. G. had no profession involving, or in the direct proximity of corpses, which is often suspected of necrophilic offenders.^{3,4} He did however possess a key to a morgue, which ensured an unlimited access to dead bodies.

G. displayed awareness of his acts, as he would worry about the legal classifications of his actions. He also displayed insight in the deviant characteristics of his behaviour. However, he did not find his behaviour to be wrong or bad in any way. He did not supply any discrete information with regard to his motivation for the necrophilic activity. He did however state that he performed the acts because of the imperviousness of his wife. The psychiatrist researching G. noted the presence of fantasies of omnipotence. He would also regularly complain about the mistakes others made. G. was found to have normal scores on the NEO personality inventory which measures the Big Five personality characteristics: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness to Experience.

Rosman and Resnick describe several motivations for necrophilia, like the possession of an unresisting and unrejecting partner; reunion with a romantic partner; conscious sexual attraction to corpses; attempt to gain comfort or to overcome feelings of isolation; unavailability of a living partner; compliance with hallucinations; religious; and attempts to gain power over a homicide victim.⁴ From the statements that G. made could be assumed that his primary motivation was the need for an unresisting and unrejecting partner. However, the excess of his necrophilic actions, e.g. the dissection of the bodies, masturbating on various body parts and the distribution of the body parts, suggest that his actions were not only motivated by the need for an unrejecting partner.

Although G. was dissatisfied with his wife sexually, the relationship was mostly harmonious. One witness stated that G. claimed to have given sleeping pills to his wife and subsequently raping her. The witness also overheard G. say that if he would have not been arrested, he would have drugged his wife, killed her and



Fig. 1. G. in a bathtub with the bowels wrapped around his body.

cut her in to pieces because she did not give him any sexual satisfaction.

3.1. Psychopathology

G. was diagnosed with a paraphilia not otherwise specified; necrophilia. There was a clear absence of any other psychiatric disorders and substance abuse disorder. Necrophilia has been connected to psychotic symptoms in some cases,⁴ however, there were none to be found in G. The pictures found on his computer indicate an interest in cannibalism, there was however no evidence for necrophagia (eating the flesh of the dead). G. did not display any forms of vampirism, as defined by Jaffé and DiCataldo.¹¹ According to the classification method by Rosman and Resnick,⁴ G. fits the genuine necrophile profile. More specifically, G. can be placed under the typology of regular necrophilia, in which a person uses pre-existing corpses for sexual purposes. The same classification can be given using Aggrawal's classification method.⁵ However, it should be noted that G. displays a peculiar behavioural development. He seems to fall into multiple categories when applying both the classifications of Rosman and Resnick and Aggrawal. Next to the regular necrophile profile, G. also seems to fit the description of necrophilic fantasy, in which he fantasizes about homicide. In the tier system presented by Aggrawal,⁵ G. also fits class III necrophiliac, the necrophilic fantasizer, as he displays many fantasizing behaviour through written stories and comics. He also fits Class IV, the tactile necrophiles; Class IV, the fetishistic necrophiles; and Class V, the necromutilomaniacs, as he obtains organs, touches them, cuts of body parts to keep around him and feels sexual pleasure by mutilating dead bodies. He does however not fit the description of an exclusive necrophile, as he still had sexual relations with his wife. With the explorative development of his necrophilia, the severity of his actions and the paraphilia seemed to increase. It is currently not possible for the authors to generalize these findings to other cases, but with a disorder as severe and socially deviant as necrophilia, it is plausible that a necrophiliac will generally begin his activity with necrophilic fantasies, followed by masturbating while touching a corpse before actually having intercourse with a dead body. This is in accordance with the DSM diagnosis of a paraphilia which indicates that the disorder increases with intensity over time.¹

This could indicate that categorizing by using strict and single typologies might over-specify the clinical picture of necrophilia. In a recent publication, Aggrawal suggests that a given necrophile may not be restricted to just one class throughout an entire lifetime and that, quite often, symptoms will intensify over time.¹² The current case is in compliance with this notion. G. was overheard saying that if he would not have been caught, he would have probably killed his wife and cut her up in a similar manner as his previous actions. This indicates that he was on his way to develop the most severe classifications of necrophilic homicide⁴ or homicidal necrophiliac.⁵ The

current case suggests a progressive severity of the disorder, instead of a more static diagnostic classification.

4. Conclusion

G was found guilty of disturbing the dead and the possession of illegal pornographic documents. He was sentenced to an involuntary placement in a forensic psychiatric facility. Because of the progressive psychopathology of his paraphilia, it was expected that G. would continue to offend in similar fashion. This lead the court to conclude that there was a significant chance of G. murdering a person in the future to get to a body. The conclusion was further supported by the texts and drawings found in G.'s possession.

During the trial the question arose if G. posed a danger to the living. The multiple categories proposed for necrophilia offer a more dimensional view of the disorder, which promotes the ability to answer such a question. However, there needs to be awareness that necrophilia can change in severity over time, as this case report demonstrates. There is still need for more case reports so that in the future empirical research can be possible on this very rare forensic phenomenon.

Conflicts of interest

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